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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model delineating attributes which enable a literate reader to successfully participate in a pluralistic society. The paper outlines the model as building upon and defining the traditional skills and schema views of reading comprehension which include maturity, attitudes, dispositions, intellectual abilities, knowledge, and experience. In this model, however, maturity emerges as the dominant attribute. The paper examines the attributes of the evaluative reader, rather than the complete model of reading comprehension already developed, and discusses the assumptions and propositions that inform the model. These include the following: (1) the reader is in a continual state of intellectual, experiential and attitudinal change; (2) a reciprocal relationship exists among a reader's attitudes, experience, and intellectual abilities; (3) age is a variable that only partly determines maturity; (4) experience and knowledge can contribute to comprehension when intellectual abilities are limited; (5) experience and knowledge have a stronger effect on attitudes and dispositions than does intellectual abilities; (6) diminishment of any of these attributes limits a reader's ability to understand a text; (7) some texts place more of a burden on one attribute rather than another; (8) some attributes can be enhanced through instruction; (9) the evaluative reader must have multiple literacies that are more than just "basic skills." The paper also describes criteria necessary for a valid assessment of the model. A figure is included. (SAM)

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The Attributes of The Literate Reader in A Pluralistic Society

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The Attributes of A Literate Reader In A Pluralistic Society

The purpose of this paper is to present a model of the attributes of the literate reader which is one component of a more comprehensive view of reading comprehension and literacy developed by Dagostino and Carifio in Reading Evaluatively and Literacy: A Cognitive View. The goal of the model to be presented is to delineate the attributes of the literate reader that are necessary for successful participation in a pluralistic society.

The model we will present expands the traditional skills and schema views (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Flood & Lapp, 1991) of reading comprehension by proposing several additional attributes and interactions that are necessary components of a view of literacy that includes evaluation of text in multiple environments. More specifically, attributes such as maturity, attitudes, dispositions, intellectual abilities, knowledge and experience are components of an adequate model of reading comprehension. In the part of the model we are discussing, maturity is the dominant attribute. Maturity means progressive development in each of the other areas identified. The reader can see issues from various points of view and recognize the need for group transcendence. Attitudes and dispositions control the openness of mind and the

receptiveness to varying perspectives necessary for good evaluation to occur (Croissen, 1968). Intellectual Abilities consist of general intelligence, reasoning ability, conceptual abilities, questioning abilities and linguistic abilities (Cronbach, 1991; Hunkins, 1989; Bruner, 1965). Finally, general knowledge and experience contribute to the general background and reading ability of the reader (Dole, et.al; 1991). This view is a reconceptualization of the many discussions of reading comprehension and literacy currently in the literature. Our view, moreover, also adds a psychological dimension and an evaluative component which are not present in previous models.

The focus of this paper is to present the attributes of the evaluative reader rather than the complete model of reading comprehension that we have developed. The questions that will be addressed in this paper are:

1. "What are the attributes of the evaluative reader?"
2. "How do these attributes enhance evaluative reading, comprehension and literacy?

The plan of the presentation is to to present the model of the evaluative reader depicted and to discuss the assumptions and propositions underlying the model.

"What are the attributes of the evaluative reader?"

The model of the evaluative reader that we are discussing in this paper is presented in Figure 1. As can be seen from Figure 1 there are four major attributes of the evaluative reader. They are (1) maturity, (2) attitudes and dispositions, (3) intellectual abilities and (4) experience and knowledge. Conceptual definitions for each attribute are as follows:

Maturity is seen as the progressive development away from egocentric thinking towards group transcendence. In our model maturity encompasses the other attributes. However, the other attributes also influence the maturation of an individual reader.

Attitudes and Dispositions represent the degree of receptiveness, openness and broadness of view on a topic or an issue. Attitudes and dispositions are shaped by beliefs, values, motivation, interest and bias.

- Beliefs are views held with or without evidence to support their validity.

- Values represent positions and priorities of importance.

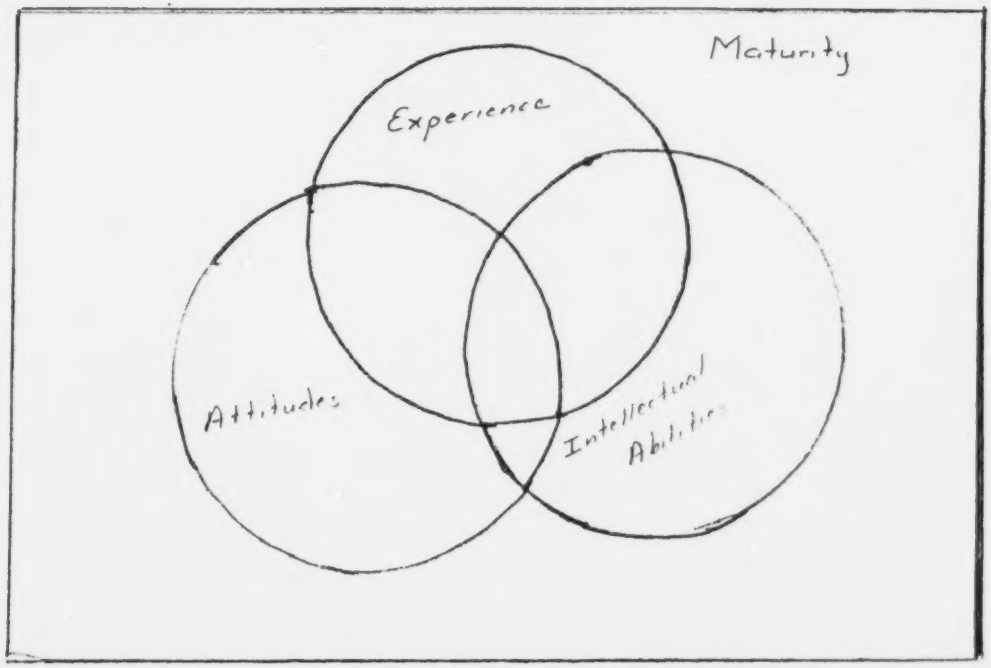
- Motivation and Interest are forces that propel pursuit of a topic, issue, problem or goal. They are sometimes tied to need.

- Bias is the particular slant or position on an issue.

Intellectual Abilities are broadly defined as the abilities that contribute to an individual's ability to think. They consist of general intelligence, reasoning abilities, conceptual abilities, questioning abilities and linguistic abilities.

Figure 1

The Evaluative Reader



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- General Intelligence is the capacity to observe and infer, to synthesize and to apply knowledge.

- Reasoning Abilities reflect drawing conclusions from data.

- Conceptual Abilities organize knowledge into coherent structures revealing relationships among propositions.

- Questioning Abilities represent the ability to identify pivotal concerns, detect discrepancies when things are unclear and investigate issues.

- Linguistic Abilities are language skills such as vocabulary, syntax, rhetorical skills.

Experience and Knowledge represent the sum of what an individual comprehends. This attribute consists of general knowledge of a topic and reading ability.

- General Knowledge of a Topic represents the organization of direct and indirect experiences.

- Reading Ability is the ability to extract, interpret and evaluate information and ideas from text

As expresssed in Figure 1, each of the above attributes of the evaluative reader contribute both jointly and uniquely to evaluative reading. Further, the precise nature and state of each of these attributes are qualitatively different at each stage of the reader's cognitive and emotional development. These points may be better understood by examining our model's postulates and axioms.

Postulates and Axioms: Assumptions Underlying the Model

Postulates and axioms are intimately related to assumptions

underlying a given model. The postulates and axioms of our model are as follows:

1. The reader is in a continual state of intellectual, experiential and attitudinal change. The reader's attitudes and dispositions, intellectual abilities and experience and knowledge are constantly interacting and shaping each other. Change can occur within each area/attribute separately. It also can occur simultaneously.

2. Maturity is both influenced by the other three attributes and influences them. As there is general development of the individual, there also is growth in each of the three attributes. As there is development of one area the other attributes have the opportunity to grow. For example, when one's attitude toward a topic is open, it is more likely that the individual will be able to build his/her knowledge base which in turn builds the concepts that one develops. As linguistic ability develops the learner is able to use language to order concepts into propositions and therefore express more complex relationships. This increased sophistication and complexity in turn allows better development of reasoning ability. All three of the aforementioned changes in turn contributes to furthering maturity.

3. Age is a variable which only partially determines maturity. Age allows for the time needed to have experiences, develop knowledge and conceptual bases, and for attitudes to develop positively or negatively. If exposure occurs and tests, or allows, linguistic ability to develop, reasoning ability may be tested and growth may occur.

4. Intellectual abilities and experience and knowledge can function in a compensatory relationship that is reciprocal in direction. This point means that experience and knowledge can contribute to comprehension when intellectual abilities are not appropriately developed or are limited. Sometimes a person's intellectual abilities may be well-developed but the person's background knowledge is limited or not being brought to bear on a situation. The individual's reasoning abilities and linguistic abilities may help the reader get the meaning of the text in those instances.

5. Experience and knowledge have a stronger effect on attitudes and dispositions than does intellectual ability. An individual can reason and conceptualize various points of view on an issue, but his/her direct experience more than reasoning seems to influence behavior and the consequences of action.

6. As any one of these attributes is diminished the reader is less open to and less capable of understanding the message of the text. This closure and reduction in turn diminishes the capacity to evaluate.

7. Some texts place more of a burden on one attribute rather than another. If the topic is a highly controversial issue, the text strains attitudes and dispositions and perhaps the reasoning abilities of the reader. If the text is abstract in nature, it strains the linguistic and conceptual abilities of the reader. If the text is discussing a very unfamiliar topic the reader will have difficulty bringing knowledge and reasoning ability to bear.

8. Some of the attributes can be enhanced through various kinds of instruction.

A further assumption of the model presented in Figure 1 is that the evaluative reader must have multiple literacies which are more than simply "basic skills". Although full explication of this assumption is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to understand that readers must be sophisticated enough to function in a variety of settings and develop a more complex ability than to read for basic comprehension.

The model of the evaluative reader presented here is a new formulation, and it requires an assessment system that is not now available. Research on this model and related hypotheses, however, requires that we address three fundamental concerns of assessment. The three concerns are: (1) defining what is to be measured (2) determining how such measurement should be made and (3) deciding how the measurements should be scored and interpreted. The initial part of this paper has addressed the first concern - conceptually defining the construct of the evaluative reader and identifying some of the postulates that constitute this model. The next part of this paper considers directions for testing the validity of the model.

Testing the validity of this model will take several directions. First, the conceptual definitions need to be validated by establishing inter-rater agreements that show that these components exist. Traditional methods of establishing agreement should work sufficiently here. Second, the postulates presented need to be clearly expressed as testable hypotheses. Doing so then leads us to the third concern of developing an assessment system that allows us to measure the construct that we are proposing. To accomplish this third and crucial goal we must address three general points relevant to establishing an appropriate assessment system for this model.

The three points that need to be addressed are related to generating responses, scoring those responses, and identifying the nature of the stimuli. The three points are:

(1) all human beings actively construct knowledge and a view of the world which they then actively modify based upon feedback, new information and experimentation

(2) the system or criteria used to "score" or evaluate reader responses and, in instructional situations, must (given 1 above)make the assessment results known to the learner; and,

(3) our model will require the use of complex assessment stimuli rather than the "simple" assessment stimuli typically used.

Each of these points has implictions for the assessment goals and methodology needed to validate our model of the evaluative reader.

In the case of the first point above, the responses generated must reveal both products and processes. The product shows the conceptualization the individual holds of a subject, idea or issue. That conceptualization must contain some evidence of attitude and intellectual ability for it to be useful. A scale for combining knowledge, attitude and intellectual ability should lead to some measure of maturity in the response. The processes revealed in the response most likely will be indicative of intellectual abilities and knowledge. In the case of the second point, the system for scoring must be

sensitive to various representations of conceptual structures, attitudes and intellectual abilities of the reader. Both the first and the second points require substantial amounts of response and fluid measures for observing these representations. The third point, in combination with the first two points, suggests that text be more representative of contextualized scenarios that prompt responses congruent with our concept of maturity as it is revealed in the component of evaluation. The traditional technique of having a brief text and multiple-choice type questions will not assess the kind of literacy we are proposing in the model presented here. Simple recall of text most likely will not be sufficient or practical either.

The model proposed here represents a different way of thinking about the reader than is presently developed in the discussions of literacy today. It is proposed as one way out of seriously limited and politically narrow views of literacy. Proposing such a different model requires that we consider the implications for assessment and develop appropriate measures.

This section of the paper considers how the model is a viable and necessary component in a view of evaluative reading, comprehension and literacy, and"How do these attributes enhance evaluative reading comprehension and literacy?"

Enhancement of evaluative reading, comprehension and literacy

Literacy has a variety of outcomes. Comprehending and evaluating text are basic goals that lead to more sophisticated outcomes of literacy. Dagostino and Carifio (1992) identify factors influencing a reader's level of literacy. Those factors can be grouped into two major components (1) The Context of Discourse and (2) The Understanding and The Expression of Thought and Emotion. The model of the evaluative reader is a viable component in a view of evaluative reading, comprehension and literacy because the attributes contribute to the reader's ability to understand how the relationship of factors such as situation, vantage points and content and language influence the ability to evaluate what one reads. The model also helps us see how factors such as an awareness of human experiences and dilemmas and responsible communication of individual and collective thought are influenced by the development of the attributes of the evaluative reader. All of these more sophisticated outcomes of literacy require comprehension evaluation thus the need for a component describing an evaluative reader.

The four attributes identified in our model of the evaluative reader work independently and interactively to contribute to

evaluation and subsequently achieving the outcomes of literacy we are striving for. Evaluation runs through all of the outcomes. A more specific look at attributes that lead to specific outcomes may further support the value of identifying attributes contributing to evaluation.

Attitudes and dispositions that are mature lead to a greater degree of social sensitivity, empathy, tolerance and openness. The reader is willing to entertain various points of view and consider each in turn. Intellectual abilities such as general intelligence, reasoning ability and conceptual abilities influence how well the reader handles different conceptual and theoretical orientations or disciplinary perspectives on a topic. Linguistic and questioning abilities help readers evaluate the use of metaphoric thinking, the use of eloquent language and the thinking and the pursuit of systematic inquiry. Experience and knowledge contribute to the reader's ability to recognize and judge the significance of ideas as well as the value of knowledge that is shared. Experience and knowledge contribute to the ability to build specialized schemas on topics or themes.

Maturity is the factor that creates a synthesis of these attributes and simultaneously draw all of these attributes together to achieve the outcomes of literacy identified here. Achieving the kind of literacy defined by the outcomes of

literacy requires that a component of evaluation be functioning all of the time.

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